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THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM OF A DEMOCRACY

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"It is my hope that the time may soon come when the poorest child living in the meanest hovel on the remotest mountain side in all this commonwealth may enjoy every educational advantage he is willing to improve."

This sentiment was expressed—if the newspaper reports may be relied upon—by the governor of Pennsylvania in a public address recently delivered to a group of rural folk assembled at a village railway station in a remote part of the state. It is a restatement in modern form of the plea with which Thaddeus Stevens thrilled and moved his colleagues in the Legislature at Harrisburg in 1835 when the repeal of the law providing for a free school system in Pennsylvania seemed imminent. It is an epigrammatic and very impressive statement of the educational aim which has dominated the efforts of all our great leaders for a century and which has guided the best impulses of all our people in all sections of the republic since the founding of our state school systems.

On the opening page of his *School and Society*, published in 1900, Professor John Dewey says: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon it destroys our democracy."

The extent to which we have succeeded in effectively embodying the ideals set up in these two quotations in the working program of our twentieth century educational systems—local, state and national—has given the world the real measure of our civic achievements. It has also furnished a fair indication of the soundness or unsoundness of our national democracy. And whether our educational achievements as a people are creditable or otherwise, when measured by the ideals we have professed, it is at once obvious that the sacrifice made by individuals, communities, and states to realize these cherished ideals constitute one of the most inspiring chapters in the whole history of social progress.

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

If we have failed to provide democratic "equality of educational opportunity for all the children of all the people" it must surely be due to some fundamental misconception of the meaning of equality or to our inability to reshape our practices in any given community with sufficient rapidity to meet the changing intellectual, social and economic conditions of a new era. Or the failure may result from both these causes. At any rate it would seem worth while to attempt a statement of what is involved in making (and keeping) our educational system truly democratic. The following propositions would appear to be defensible and sufficiently important to merit some special emphasis:

1. There should be an efficient school reasonably accessible to every child who may profit by its ministry.

2. The school system should be so organized and conducted as to minister with equal diligence to the needs of pupils of each of the several grades of natural ability.

3. The program of school studies and activities should be so many-sided as to show equal deference to the tastes and interests and needs—vocational and cultural—of all.

4. The school system should be so organized as not to encourage or permit the segregation of social classes and should be so conducted as not to exemplify an undemocratic control of student activities.

5. The administration and control of our educational systems should be vested jointly in central and local authorities and the highest intelligence and best judgment of expert and layman should be brought to bear on the formulation and execution of general educational policies.

6. All the educational agencies of the local community, of the state, and of the nation should be brought to bear upon the post-school education of both adolescents and adults.

It is the purpose of the writer to develop these several theses as fully as the space allotment will permit.

SCHOOLS MADE ACCESSIBLE

There should be an efficient school reasonably accessible to every child who may profit by its ministry. There is a very general impression abroad among us that this has long been accomplished. Not so. We have, to be sure, made legal provision in most states for bringing elementary school facilities within easy reach of all our children, but we have in many instances gone no further than

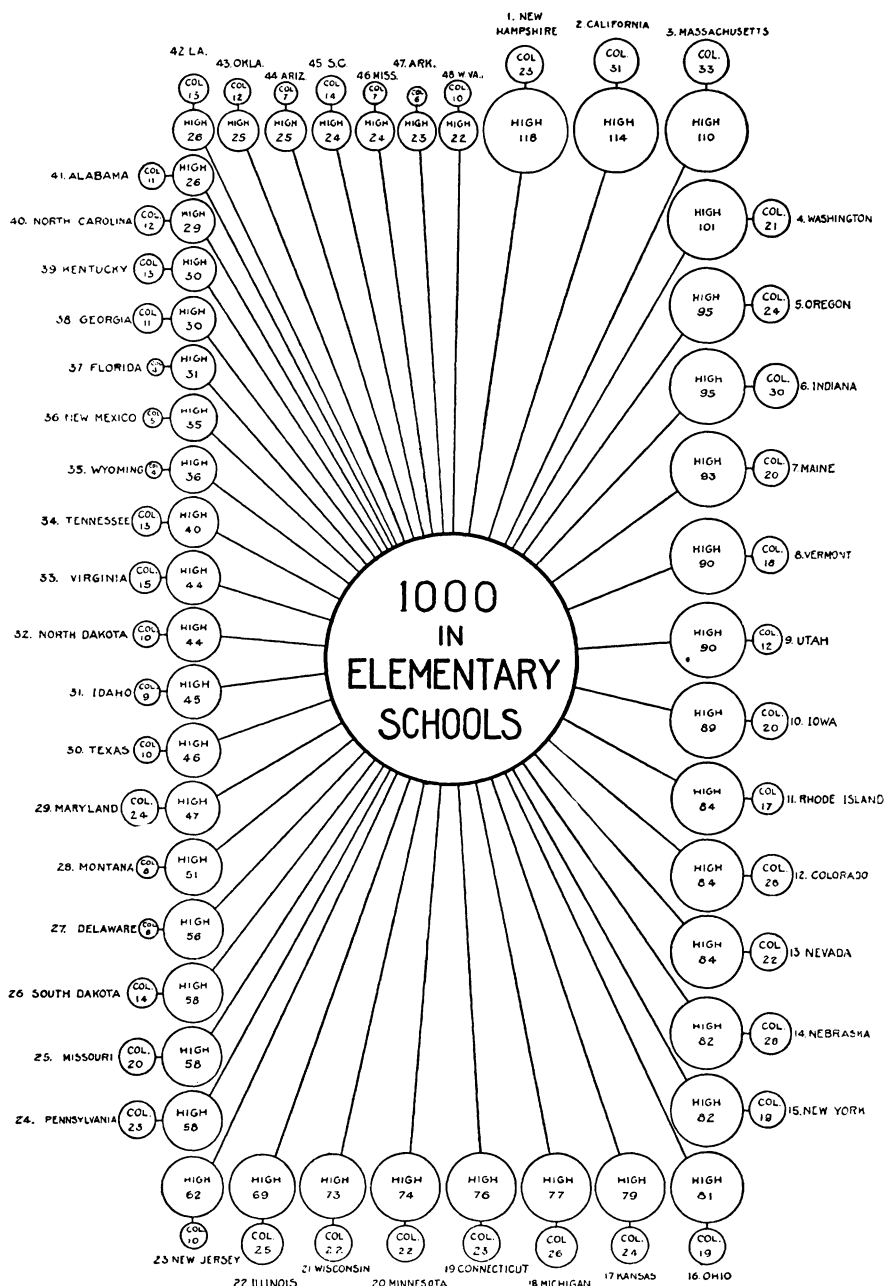
the mere enactment of such provisions. They are by no means uniformly enforced—not even in the spirit of the law.

In many of our large cities a considerable proportion of our children of elementary school grade are on part time for lack of adequate school accommodations and tens of thousands of others are in schools which ought long ago to have been abandoned. In rural districts thousands of the smaller children reach school only by traveling unreasonable distances, and it frequently happens that they are then housed in most unsuitable buildings—lacking all the ordinary comforts which are conducive to health and school progress. The decline in rural population has left many of these schools with so small an enrollment as to render anything like efficient work wholly impossible.

In the city the rapid growth of population and the constant shifting of congested centers have made the problem of providing suitable and adequate school facilities very difficult of solution. It is gratifying, however, to note that in many places where the school population has been increasing most rapidly—in the congested areas of our tenement districts—splendid modern elementary school buildings are springing up. Many of these are so magnificent and substantial as to suggest the great cathedrals of the Middle Ages. In the open country the movement for the consolidation of one-teacher schools by the free transportation of pupils to some central point in the district has made much progress in many sections and promises an easy and satisfactory solution of this problem in all communities where mountain barriers or impassable roads do not render the plan impracticable.

In the field of secondary education the situation is far less satisfactory. The feeling is not uncommon among large numbers of our people—in city and in country—that the state's obligation has been fully discharged when the mere rudiments of an education have been provided at public expense. As a result, adequate educational facilities above the elementary school grades are provided with certainty only where the majority of the people are aware of the educational possibilities of the golden period of adolescence. And even in such communities the equipment of the high school plant usually makes no adequate provision for all the work of a many-sided curriculum. There are still large areas, including whole states, where free secondary education is within reach of only a very

PUPILS IN HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES FOR EACH 1,000 PUPILS ENROLLED IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN EACH STATE IN 1910



(From publications of the Russell Sage Foundation. There is no good evidence that the distributions have been radically changed since 1910—the date of this chart.)

small fraction of the boys and girls that are eligible. At a time when intelligent men and women everywhere agree that the free education of all normal young people should continue well through the period of adolescence, it is surely a violation of every principle of sound democracy to deny high school advantages to any adolescent merely because of untoward circumstances over which as an individual he can have no control. Unhappily, too, these advantages are most frequently denied to the alert and ambitious boys and girls of the rural districts where it would seem the nation is just now in most urgent need of capable leadership.

It is most gratifying, however, to note the achievements of the past two decades in the rapid extension of high schools. Up to the year 1900 there were scarcely a dozen public institutions in all of the South which by the best standards of the times could be called high schools. These were exclusively in the large cities. Today almost a thousand high grade public secondary schools exist in that section alone and the progress elsewhere has been almost equally noteworthy. A single small county in Indiana has built fifteen magnificent rural high schools during the past eight years. The outlook for the immediate future is bright. The recent rapid growth of permanent state school funds and the practice of apportioning large grants of money for the aid and encouragement of the smaller high schools will in the near future—unless all signs fail—bring secondary education, certainly in all our more thickly populated states, within reach of all who really desire its benefits.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that there is need for a more general equalization of opportunities for university, college and technical school training at public expense among all the professional and industrial groups in our complex population and for a more equitable distribution of such facilities in the sparsely settled areas of our country. These readjustments are, in many respects, as vital to the interests of democracy as is the general promotion of elementary and secondary education among all the children of all the people. Lack of space forbids the full development of this statement.

The situation as described above, while satisfactory in many respects, presents some bad symptoms. The reason for the delay in many sections—in city and in country—in providing school facilities equally satisfactory in character and reasonably accessible

to all is certainly not due to any serious economic limitations. We are living in a "surplus economy"; and our total taxable wealth is adequate for the most severe demands which our school budgets may make upon it. The real reason then must be found in the survival of the undemocratic notion that some special consideration is due the individuals and the communities which contribute the larger share of the public taxes and that the less prosperous individuals and the poorer communities—where usually children are most numerous—are less worthy of consideration. The frequency with which one may hear the well-to-do classes in our industrial cities remark that such and such school accommodations are "good enough" for the sweat shop districts and the frequency also with which one may hear rural folk grant the easy assumption that city people in general are for some reason "entitled" to better school facilities than those living in the open country furnish adequate proof that we have not as a people clearly understood the state's equal obligation to all. Industrial cities have in many instances accumulated tremendous taxable assets by removing the natural wealth from forest and mine in larger areas, sometimes far removed. In some cases they have found it all but impossible to expend their school revenues raised from the levy of the minimum millage on an assessment based on a fractional part of the market value of property. In other instances the "meanest types of schools" have been maintained for the minimum term only by an excessive burden of taxation upon the "peasants" who still occupy these *denuded* mountains. A superficial study of school district boundaries, of property assessments, of tax rates and of school expenditures in almost any of our states will at once reveal concrete evidence of glaring inequality. The only real remedy for it must be found in the application of the democratic principle of "taxing equally all the property of all the people for the support of equal educational opportunities for all the children of all the people." In theory this principle has long met with general acceptance; in practice it has been by no means universally applied. Until that has been done, the first step has not been taken in carrying out the educational program of a truly democratic republic.

PROVISIONS FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Our school systems should be so organized and conducted as to minister with equal diligence to the needs of pupils of each of the several grades of natural ability.

It used to be assumed that the benefits of education were heaven ordained for the privileged few and that at best these advantages might be safely extended to such promising children outside the ranks of the "best families" as should in some way or other give indication of the possibility of capable and useful leadership.

With the development during the nineteenth century of a more democratic concept of education, there have come not only free schools for all but also some forms of educational compulsion, covering at least the childhood period. This has resulted not primarily from any philanthropic impulse to guarantee to childhood its inalienable rights but rather from the conscious purpose of society to protect itself from the burdens imposed by those who otherwise might grow up morally vicious, physically defective or economically dependent. This compulsion first took the form of enforced school attendance. It brought into our school systems a large contingent of children either mentally incompetent or physically unfit for profitable participation in the traditional school program of studies and activities. The rapid decline during the past twenty-five years in the relative numbers in attendance at private "select" schools for those thought to be especially capable has brought into the public school systems another considerable group.

Our public school enrollment has since been more or less typical of all the social and industrial groups in our entire population and is everywhere truly representative of all conceivable shades of variation in individual native endowment of positive and sometimes even of negative character. This is especially true in the elementary grades. To state the facts in more scientific terms one might say that there are about four per cent of talented pupils some of them bordering on real genius; about ninety-two per cent who are neither highly talented nor in any real sense feeble-minded ranging from the bright, active and alert types all the way down to the slowest and dullest; and about four per cent who may be designated as feeble-minded, usually including a considerable number of really deficient mentality.

Speaking in terms of their educability we need to designate only two groups; the first composed of those who under proper instruction and training—including industrial as well as academic—may become socially competent, that is, self supporting and more or less

independent members of society; the second composed of a relatively small number who, because of congenital weakness or defect or through serious disease or other subsequent misfortune, will always—in spite of any advantages which the school may offer—be and remain socially incompetent, that is dependent upon others for actual support and in most cases requiring institutional care. This second group includes the morally insane, the violent, the demented, the feeble-minded, epileptics, those suffering from chronic infectious diseases, and such as are helplessly crippled or deformed. Not being in any proper sense of the term educable subjects, they are usually isolated in custodial institutions.

It may be said with respect to the larger group, those who are educable and therefore socially competent—and this includes nearly all the children in most communities—that the problem of making adequate provision for all types of them seems to be one of growing complexity. This is not really the case, however. The fact that experts in our psychological clinics, in our schools of education and in our public school systems have identified many types of misfits and have discovered some of the causes for the considerable retardation which has clogged the machinery of our elementary school grades has only emphasized the complexity of the problem. All of these special investigations and studies have in one form or another revealed the simple fact that children have *individual* characteristics and *individual* needs. As a result educational authorities and teachers everywhere are making commendable efforts to provide an educational program of interest and of social value for every child. They have greatly enriched the course of study in recent years and have provided for new forms of instruction in a great variety of special types of public institutions. These include in many of our large centers at least the following schools or classes: for the blind, for the deaf, for delinquents (including persistent truants), for cripples, for anemics, for children suffering from nervous diseases, for children having speech defects, for foreigners (until they learn the elements of English), for the backward, for such as especially need certain types of motor training, and for supernormal or exceptionally gifted children.¹

¹ See Van Sickle, Witmer and Ayres, *Provisions for Exceptional Children in Public Schools*, United States Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C. Also Mitchell, David, *Schools and Classes for Exceptional Children*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

The progress made in recent years in perfecting plans of school organization by means of which children in any given school system might be promoted with varying degrees of rapidity and on the completion of different amounts of work is quite as gratifying and commendable.²

It is not necessary to suggest that segregation affords many practical advantages to so called "normal" children (from whose classes many of them have been removed) as well as to the variants or sub-deviates themselves. Nor is it necessary any longer to defend the practice against the objections of those who once regarded it as un-American and undemocratic. It must be at once obvious to all intelligent citizens that equality of educational opportunity does not necessarily imply identity or even similarity of educational opportunity and that it is in the interests of both society and the individual that these special provisions should be made. Any educational program which is truly democratic must endeavor to guarantee to every educable child the fullest measure of spiritual freedom which is for him attainable—regardless of whether society has designated him as a genius or a "supernormal" or has placed upon him the stigma of "dullard," "laggard" or "subnormal."

A MANY-SIDED CURRICULUM

The program of school studies and activities should be so many-sided as to show equal deference to the tastes and interests and needs—vocational and cultural—of all.

Much of what has been said under the previous heading would apply with equal force in support of this proposition. Preparation for participation in the ever increasingly complex social life of our times demands a training as wide as life itself. Any intelligent discussion of the "essentials" of education must be based on a clear recognition of two fundamental facts; first, that no traditional course of study, no branch of learning, no type of training, no "discipline," may properly be regarded as an essential in education in twentieth century America—no matter how important it may have been at any previous period in history or among any other people—unless it meets some distinctly human need in the life of the individual or of society; second, that the individual's and

²See Holmes, W. H., *School Organization and the Individual Child*, Worcester, Mass.

society's needs must to an ever increasing degree be supplied by the ministry of the expert, the professional, whose specialized knowledge and technical training may never be regarded as the common essentials in the educational equipment required of all. A clear recognition of these facts would lead to several important results:

First. In the elementary school we should omit much of the traditional subject-matter—not whole branches of study, but parts of them—which belongs to the field of the specialist or which for other reasons no longer functions in our new social order. If this were done we should have ample time and opportunity to introduce much new subject-matter which has large social value. We must first trim the dead limbs from the tree of knowledge.

Second. In the secondary school we should surely place a larger emphasis upon vocational training in the non-professional callings. Is it not true that all education of adolescents worthy of the name has ever been predominantly vocational in its purpose even for the small number who until recently monopolized the advantages of the secondary school? And is it not equally true that for the great majority of men and women—in all the callings of life—the truest happiness and the broadest and most genuinely democratic culture has ever been attained through intelligent and willing participation in some form of socially useful vocational activity? It has already been well demonstrated in at least a few places that the more nearly the secondary school approximates the spirit of a splendidly organized coöperatively managed work shop the more genuinely cultural is its discipline and the more certainly continuing is its influence on most of those who participate in its activities.

Third. In the field of higher professional education we should no longer limit full recognition to the so-called learned professions of law, medicine, and divinity. It is surely open to serious question whether under the conditions of modern life the lawyer can render society as significant service as the engineer, whether the physician can relieve human misery as effectively as the sanitarian can prevent it, or whether the minister can forestall moral and spiritual disaster as successfully in most instances as the teacher can. Society still needs and always will need the services of the "learned" professions, but their ministries alone will not suffice. Happily our state uni-

versities and even many of our privately endowed colleges of liberal arts are no longer, through the subtle influence of a "regular" course, guiding into one line of professional pursuits men and women preëminently fitted by native gifts and by acquired tastes for some other. A score of new professions are opening the doorway of opportunity for multitudes of young men and women to render large human service and the day is fast coming when no institution of higher learning chartered for the service of a democracy will wish to enforce purely traditional requirements or arbitrary standards in such manner as to close this door in the face of worthy young people who have come from public high schools which are not—and never ought to be—primarily "college preparatory" institutions.

Each of the several articles included in Part I of this volume was written to illustrate the extent to which the social viewpoint has come to dominate in theory and in practice some one or more aspects of American education in all grades of schools and in all types of educational institutions. The shifting of points of emphasis in the curriculum of public education and the number of opportunities offered by the more flexible organization of the best schools for larger participation in the common social interests of modern life furnish ample evidence that schools of all grades are making a willing response to the demands of twentieth century democracy.³

NO SEGREGATION OF SOCIAL CLASSES

The school system should be so organized as not to encourage or even permit the segregation of social classes and should be so conducted as not to exemplify an undemocratic control of student activities.

In defense of the first of these propositions it may be said that the deep cleavage between the social classes in the life of adult society—the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the members of the "best families" and "common folks," the working and the leisure groups, the orthodox and the dissenter—at once suggests by contrast that the school is exerting a far-reaching influence in promoting during the childhood period that social solidarity, that large human sympathy and common brotherhood, which is the essence of true democracy. The American school is undoubtedly

³ See Lewis, William D. *Democracy's High School*. Houghton Mifflin Co., New York.

one of the very best loved social institutions of modern times and chiefly, it would seem, because it has broken down so many of the artificial barriers between social classes. So successful has our public school system generally been in this respect that the term "common school" is no longer a term of reproach but rather a badge of honor. The time has indeed come when every private school must contribute to democracy as well as to academic efficiency if it is to command general approval even among the social class primarily responsible for its support. Every child of the republic must be effectively taught to know and *trained to feel* that neither the rank nor antiquity of his ancestors, nor his wealth or personal gifts nor any other accident of fortune can command for him the respect of his fellows; that this prize can be won only by personal merit.

With respect to the second contention it should be observed that no matter how fine the ideals which determine the spirit of control there still is need for eternal vigilance on the part of school authorities lest a small clique within the student body should unwittingly exemplify "boss rule" in the conduct of student activities. And every teacher should make conscious efforts every day and every hour to promote among students that self control which is the crowning individual achievement of a free people. School authorities and teachers should never deceive themselves with the belief that a school organized like an absolute monarchy can be made an effective means for instruction and training in the principles of democracy.

CENTRAL AND LOCAL SCHOOL CONTROL

The administration and control of our educational systems should be vested jointly in central and local authorities and the highest intelligence and best judgment of expert and layman should be brought to bear on the formulation and execution of general educational policies.

The form and spirit of the official control of schools furnishes a topic the intelligent discussion of which will always be vital to the interests of democracy. At the time of the educational revival in New England almost one hundred years ago it was generally believed that the decadent condition of public school sentiment was due to the fact that the control of schools had fallen into the hands of exclusively local and lay authorities. There has been a progress-

ive tendency since then to centralize authority in the control and administration of schools and to place the conduct of schools and school systems, state, municipal, and rural, under the supervision of experts or professionally trained leaders. That this has on the whole resulted in much improvement of educational conditions must be obvious; that it is fraught with some dangers there can be no doubt.

It is argued that centralization of authority promotes efficiency by developing uniformity of educational policy and administrative practice over large areas, that it permits the collective wisdom of the larger group to control the actions of the smaller group, that it guarantees some continuity of policy and that it makes possible the development of the numerous types of educational experts without whose guidance and supervision progress cannot be assured.

On the other hand the opponents of centralized control and administration present some indictments which must not be too lightly dismissed. They say it lacks adaptability to meet the needs of communities differing widely in density of population, in industries, and in economic and social needs; that it uniformly results in a waning of popular interest; that it diminishes the possibilities of experimentation with new types of education; and that after a time it tends to entail the evils of a bureaucracy.

That these advantages and disadvantages of centralization follow in turn is a matter of common observation in many states and local communities; that a complete return of the administrative control of schools to local and lay authorities would be even more disastrous is equally obvious.

The complete exercise of a given function may be divided between two agencies, one of which represents the relatively expert and centralized aspect of administration, the other the more democratic and local. According to conditions the initiative will be with one or the other of these agencies. . . .

Another system of correctives to centralization is that to be found in the existence of bodies which, in the exercise of more or less localized functions, reflect public opinion, inform official and centralized agencies, and in turn, through the exercise of these powers, are themselves enlightened and have their appreciation of the general system of administration enhanced. . . .

Lay agencies and commissions, temporary or permanent, should be developed widely to represent local sentiment, to study administration and finally to express public opinion.

Commissioner Snedden of Massachusetts suggests a rational solution.⁴

The several articles included in Part II of this volume were written—in most instances—to illustrate by concrete example several types of non-official coöperating agencies, whose activities stimulate local interest and prompt local enthusiasm, and whose discussions are enlightening to central and local authorities charged with the official control of public education. Upon such non-official community organizations and auxiliary school societies as these we must depend to keep alive the spirit of democratic control of public education when the forms of such control have passed.

EDUCATION IN THE POST-SCHOOL PERIOD OF LIFE

All the educational agencies of the local community, of the state and of the nation should be brought to bear upon the post-school education of both adolescents and adults.

That education—in the large meaning of the term—is the greatest single human need, that it may be secured during the hours of labor as certainly as during the hours of leisure, that it may result from well directed toil as surely as from the study of books, that it is not entirely dependent upon schools and colleges and organized institutions of learning, that it is a life-long process and the most certain means by which men may become free, have come to be cardinal doctrines among thoughtful people. That so many capable men and women in our day are devoting their time and energies to the multiplication and direction of agencies in great variety—official and non-official—for the promotion of the education of all people, adults as well as children, furnishes the best possible evidence that as a nation we are seeking to realize our spiritual inheritance.

The recent rapid growth in the number and variety of continuation schools and the widening scope of their service especially to adolescents; the larger participation of university, college and technical school authorities in the education of non-collegiate groups at centers far removed from seats of learning and in subjects other than the standard courses offered by these institutions on the

⁴ See Snedden, David. *Educational Readjustment*, Chapter X. Houghton, Mifflin Co., New York.

campus; the extension activities of state departments of education as exemplified by the recent developments in Massachusetts in the establishment of a University Extension department or division under the direction and control of the State Board of Education; the establishment of scores of non-academic institutions offering correspondence-study courses of a high grade and in a great variety of technical subjects and enrolling hundreds of thousands of students from all the walks of life; the growing tendency among city school officials to throw school buildings open to community uses for the special promotion of the education of the adult population by providing lectures, concerts, moving pictures, etc., at public expense and under public school direction and supervision as in New York City; the public presentation in city and in country of oratorios, dramas and historical pageants in which the whole community may participate; the farm and home demonstrations of the possibilities of improvement in rural economic, social and living conditions by agents of the state and federal governments; the organized efforts to bring good music, art and literature within the reach of all classes everywhere and the participation of the municipal, state and federal governments in the promotion of these objects; the multiplied activities of official agencies local, state and national in the promotion of adult education through official exhibits and reports and through educational propaganda; the active participation of college and university experts in conferences for the improvement of civic conditions and the enlargement and enrichment of our national program of education all bear witness to the increasing intelligence of all classes and to the growing faith of a free people in the ministry of public education.

The fifteen separate articles in Part III of this volume describe each in turn some special aspect of this comprehensive movement for the extension of educational facilities among adolescents and adults after their school days are over. It is most inspiring to read these articles and be made to realize how many thoughtful men and women in the great industrial pursuits, in factories and mills and mines and shops, in stores, on railroad trains and elsewhere in the crowded marts are, under the inspiration of this movement, increasing their vocational efficiency while pondering great thoughts, profound principles of life and conduct, gleaned from books; and to contemplate how many there are who in the silent hours of the night

are mastering the world's great literature and philosophy and science. Each of these contributions not only tells its own story effectively and interestingly but gives in passing many suggestions of possible enlargement of the scope of extension activities and many indications of growing enthusiasm for the whole movement. No other one of the "new possibilities in education" is more vital to the interests of democracy than the nation-wide attempt that is now being made to keep alive the spirit of youth and progress among all classes of the adult portion of our population and no other single educational enterprise is likely to be more uniformly successful and popular in the immediate future.⁵

CONCLUSION

Education—using the term in no narrow or pedantic sense—is the chief business of a democracy. Because it comprehends every human interest and may be made to minister to every human need it must be made accessible and free. It is not alone for the gifted nor for any special or privileged class. For most people (above the elementary grades) it must be predominantly vocational, in order that for them it may be truly cultural. All professional training must aim at social service. Education must be controlled by all the people in the interests of all the people, and it must be a continuing, life-long, process. Thus only may we as individuals and as a nation come into full possession of the spiritual inheritance of a free people.

⁵ See Perry, A. C. *The Extension of Public Education in the United States*. United States Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C.